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ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

OCTOBER, 1854.

BRIEF ANSWER TO PLEAS FOR DEFENSIVE WAR.

ABRIDGED FROM JONATHAN DYMOND.

In considering the question of *defensive* war, I must, in the first place, beg the reader to bear in mind, that some of the most powerful feelings of his nature, and the whole strength of his habits of thought and preconceived opinions, are enlisted against us; and I would therefore ask him to attain as complete an abstraction from the influence of these feelings and opinions as shall be in his power.

The lawfulness of defensive war is commonly simplified to *the right of self-defence*. The instinct of self-preservation, it is said, is an instinct of nature; and, since this instinct is implanted by God, whatever is necessary to self-preservation is accordant with his will. This is specious; but, like many other specious arguments, it is sound in its premises, though, as I think, fallacious in its conclusions. That the instinct of self-preservation is an instinct of nature, is clear — that, because it is an instinct of nature, therefore we have a right to kill other men, is *not* clear. The fallacy of the argument appears to consist in this — that it assumes an instinct of nature to be a law of *paramount* authority, and overlooks the fact that God has instituted a *superior law*, by which we are required to regulate all our instincts. The practical question, therefore, is not whether self-preservation be an instinct of nature, but whether, and to what extent, Christianity has restricted its operation?

Now, if we refer to the authority of the sacred Scriptures, we shall find that many of the dispositions and actions to which the instinct of self-preservation prompts us, are precisely those which Christianity most expressly forbids: they are non-forbearance, resistance, retaliation of injuries. It is, indeed, against what would be called lawful *self-defence*, that the peaceable precepts of Christianity are directed. *Offence* appears not even to have suggested itself. These precepts are — “Resist not *evil* . . . Overcome *evil* with good . . . Do good to them that *hate* you . . . Love your ene-

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mies . . . Render not evil for evil . . . Whoso smiteth thee on the one cheek . . . Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath." All this supposes previous offence, or injury, or violence; and it is *then* that forbearance is enjoined.

It is, however, objected that several of these precepts are not to be understood in their literal sense, the language in which they are expressed being obviously figurative. This is readily admitted; but the admission is of little service to the advocates of war, since, whatever difficulty may be supposed to exist in determining with *precise accuracy* what these passages mean, there can be none whatever in determining that there is much which they do *not* mean. By no possible latitude of interpretation can the precept 'resist not evil,' be construed to allow of bombardment — devastation — murder; neither can the injunction "love your enemies," be interpreted to mean — ruin their commerce — sink their fleets — shoot through their hearts. And if it does not mean all this, it does not mean war. The figurative character, therefore, of some of the precepts referred to, presents no valid objection to the correctness of our argument; for, if we give to our objectors whatever license of interpretation they may desire, they cannot so interpret the precepts as to make them allow of *war*.

But we are told that a distinction is to be made between rules which apply to us as *individuals*, and those which apply to us as *subjects of the state*; and that the pacific injunctions of Christianity have no reference to our conduct as members of the political body. This is an argument to which great importance is attached by the advocates of war, although the reasoning by which it has been supported is singularly weak and inconclusive. The chapter "On War," in Dr. Paley's *Moral Philosophy*, begins thus: — "Because the Christian Scriptures describe wars as what they are, as crimes or judgments, some men have been led to believe that it is unlawful for a Christian to bear arms. But it should be remembered that it may be necessary for individuals to unite their force, and for this end to resign themselves to a common will; and yet it may be true, that that will is often actuated by criminal motives, and often determined to destructive purposes." This is a most remarkable paragraph; it assumes at once the whole subject of inquiry, and is an assumption couched in extraordinary laxity of language: "It may be necessary for individuals to unite their force" — the tea-table and drawing-room have often told us this; but *philosophy* should tell us how the necessity is proved. Nor is the morality of the paragraph more rigid than the philosophy — "*wars are crimes*," and are often undertaken from "*criminal motives, and determined to destructive purposes*;" yet of these purposes, and motives, and crimes, "*it may be necessary*" for Christians to become the abettors and accomplices!

If it be said that Christianity allows to individuals some degree and kind of resistance, and that some resistance is therefore lawful to states, we do not deny it. But if it be said that the degree of lawful resistance extends to the slaughter of our fellow-men — that it extends to war — we *do* deny it; we say that the rules of Christianity cannot, by any possible latitude of

interpretation, be made to extend to it. The *difficulty* of obeying the forbearing rules of Christianity, may be greater in the case of nations than in the case of individuals; but the *obligation* to obey them is the same in both. "What I say unto you, I say unto all."

What, then, is the principle for which we contend? *An unreasoning reliance upon Providence for defence in all those cases in which we should violate his laws by defending ourselves.* If a wisdom which we acknowledge to be unerring, has determined and declared, that any given conduct is right, and that it is good for man, it appears preposterous and irreverent to argue that another can be better. The Almighty certainly *knows* our interests; and, if he has not directed us in the path which promotes them, the conclusion is inevitable, that he has voluntarily directed us amiss. Will the advocate of war abide by this conclusion? And if he will not, how will he avoid the opposite conclusion, that the path of forbearance is the path of expediency?

This is the point from which we wander — WE DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD! When this statement is formally made to us, we think it perhaps untrue; but our practice is an evidence of its truth — for if we did believe, we should also *confide* in it, and should be willing to stake upon it the consequence of our obediences. We can talk with sufficient fluency of "trusting in Providence;" but, in the application of it to our conduct in life, we know wonderfully little. There are many who believe that war is disallowed by Christianity, and would rejoice if it were for ever abolished; but there are few who are willing to maintain an undaunted stand against it, when difficulty or suffering would be the consequence. Yet these are the supporters of whom Christianity stands in need. She wants men who are willing to *suffer* for her principles.

I hope, for the sake of his understanding and his heart, that the reader will not say I reason on the supposition that the world is what it is not; and that, although these duties may be binding on us when the world shall become purer, yet that we must now accommodate ourselves to the state of things as they are. This is to say, that in a land of assassins, assassination would be right. If no one begins to reform his practice until others have begun before him, reformation will never begin. If apostles, or martyrs, or reformers, had "accommodated themselves to the existing state of things," where had now been Christianity itself? The business of reformation belongs to him who sees that reformation is required. The world has no other human means of amendment. If you believe that war is not allowed by Christianity, it is your business to oppose it; and, if fear or distrust should raise questions on the consequences, apply the words of our Saviour, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

SOLDIERS DONT KNOW WHAT THEY FIGHT FOR. — When the French troops embarked at Toulon for Constantinople, an old man who witnessed their departure, exclaimed in a mournful voice, "there goes my only child, to fight for a cause he does not understand, and against men with whom he never had a difference."